sample survey on household consumer expenditure conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) at an interval of approximately five years. Based on this, the percentage of population living below the poverty line for the minorities has been estimated for the year 1999-2000. The corresponding estimate of the number of persons living below the poverty line is not available.

Government is committed to ensuring the welfare of the minorities. The Prime Minister's New 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities is a major step in this direction. The following schemes have been approved/are being implemented for the welfare of the minorities:—

(i) Merit-cum-means based scholarship for technical and professional courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level,

(ii) Post-matric scholarship scheme,

(Hi) Pre-matric scholarship scheme, (iv)

Free coaching and allied scheme,

(v) Schemes of Maulana Azad Education Foundation, (vi) Schemes of National

Minorities Development Corporation. A sum of Rs. 1,000 crore has been proposed in

the budget 2008-09 for these schemes.

Status of minorities

1780. SHRI KAMAL AKHTAR: Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

whether Government proposes to bring 103rd Constitutional amendment seeking State-wise minority status, rather than national status, of minorities in the country;

if so, the rationale behind this amendment;

whether this amendment is in violation of article 25-30 of the Constitution providing protection to religious minorities;

if so, the reasons for bringing this amendment;

whether, after this amendment, some minority communities are likely to lose their minority status in their respective States and denial of the benefit to them; and

if so, the steps taken or being taken by Government to ensure the protection of rights of minorities?

THE MINISTER OF MINORITY AFFAIRS (SHRI A.R. ANTULAY): (a) to (f) The Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Bill to confer constitutional status on the National Commission for Minorities was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December, 2004. The Bill includes a definition of' minority'. The recemmendations of the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment regarding the Bill have considered but some other related issues are still under examination.